THE FULFILMENT

In the novels of the middle period, Henry James had explored the limits of refinement in relation to the human personalty as it reacted to the objective world, exercising upon it a subjective pressure, and yet recovering for itself through refinement a sense of objective existence from the world of impersonal facts and forces. The characters of these novels seem to expend all their moral energy in extricating their personality from the demands of a complex reality polarized between the objective and the subjective modes of selfhood. What refinement they show, or are capable of, is neutralized by this struggle for awareness beyond which their selfhood cannot enact the significance of human 'being', in other words, the process of refinement does not rise to the level of moral heroism. But in the novels of the major phase, Henry James dramatises a persistent moral heroism leading to the refinements of moral action consisting of renunciation, social and ethical responsibility and, above ail, the experience of personal growth in the major characters. Henry James arrives at his artistic best, as it were, when in these novels he analyses moral truth in its several perspectives offered by the dynamics of refinement, as it affects, alters and transforms the lives and the visions of his major intelligences.

In *The Ambassadors,* Henry James explores and dramatises the idea of refinement in terms of an evolving and mellowing consciousness. Like Isabel and Newman, Lambert Strether is an American innocent abroad in Europe, and is also a 'vessel' of consciousness on whom 'nothing is lost'. He is Mrs. Newsome's ambassador from Woollett to Paris, and the mission on which he is sent is to rescue young Chad Newsome from the clutches of a 'hideous' Parisian enchantress, Mme. de Vionnet. Success in his mission would open up 'an opulent future' for Strether with Mrs. Newsome as his wife.

The highly perceptive and imaginative Strether sets foot on the

English soil conscious of "the oddity of a double consciousness.
There was detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference/'[1]
Unlike Chad and Jim, Strether does not regard Europe as a 'gilded holiday toy' to play with and discard at will. He does not share Woollen's prejudices regarding life in Paris. His is not, however, a blind admiration of European life and culture. He keeps art open mind, and is on his guard. From the moment he alights in England, fc? has a feeling of refreshing ease antf harmony. A new chapter **is.**